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Songs of Courage

and Other Poems

by

Bertha F. Gordon



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SONGS OF COURAGE



Bertie F. Gordon

Songs of Courage

and Other Poems

by
Bertha F. Gordon



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*"Go, little book, and wish to all
Flowers in the garden, meat in the
hall,
A bin of wine, a spice of wit,
A house with lawns enclosing it,
A living river by the door,
A nightingale in the sycamore."*

—Stevenson.

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FOREWORD

THE first collection of Miss Gordon's poems was published in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1909, under the happy title of "Overtones," and met with a sympathetic appreciation by an ever extending circle of readers—an appreciation which has grown to enthusiasm on the part of many.

No less an authoritative critic than the literary reviewer of the conservative *Boston Transcript*, said of this collection, when it appeared: "Once or twice perhaps in every decade a little unassuming pamphlet of verse issues from the press almost still-born, and its chance of lengthy life seems very slight. One recalls in the past such little books as 'Tares' and 'Diversi Coloren,' 'Primavera,' and Miss Reese's 'A Branch of May.' We claim to have discovered a worthy addition to this select group in 'Overtones,' by Bertha F. Gordon. No woman save Miss Guiney has sounded the note of spiritual valor with such courageous beauty as Miss Gordon does in her 'Song at the Brink of Death'; for its spirit is unconquerable, not till death, as many boast, but always, even beyond the portals of the grave." "The fact is," concludes this reviewer, "that the American poets of the younger generation who show achievement may be counted on the dial of a timepiece. It is Miss Gordon's distinction

Foreword

that she is worthy of being ranked among the twelve."

Other reviewers have spoken of her poems with enthusiasm equal to that of this eminent critic. They have been translated into the German by the Baroness Von Blomberg.

A second collection of Miss Gordon's poems, under the title "Songs of Courage," was privately printed in 1910 at the press of Hal W. Trovillion, and this bibelot also achieved unqualified recognition from discerning readers.

The present little volume is composed of the verses contained in both of the earlier collections, together with a number of new poems never before published. The title of the second collection is retained for this complete edition, as it suggests better than any other the note of "spiritual valor" which characterizes all of the poems.

Mr. Trovillion, in an appreciative and discriminating foreword to the "Songs of Courage," printed at his press, gives a very brief sketch of Miss Gordon's career. He points out that "She is not one who watches life through opera glasses from the library window; but, on the contrary, knows the world from having mixed much in its affairs. Born and reared in Boston, she was surrounded with all the intellectual advantages of that famous center of culture. The concerts of the Boston Symphony Orchestra made a profound impression upon

Foreword

her, and it is probably because of that musical influence that she is to-day a musician and composer. Indeed her chief claim to distinction lies in her music rather than in her poetry." Miss Gordon has composed music for some of her own lyrics; and has made a number of exquisitely beautiful settings for the words of other poets, besides composing in all the other musical forms, including the symphonic.

"It must have been something of a plunge," Mr. Trovillion continues, "for her to be taken out of this refined world and set down amid the mining camps and cattle ranches of the Rockies. Yet here she spent two of the happiest years of her life. The primeval immensity, the varied voices, but above all the silence of the wilds, made a potent appeal to her tensely strung nature.

"After her sojourn in Colorado she came to live (and lives to-day) in Chicago. Here she earns her bread by the chisel and the hammer, being a teacher of Manual Training. For side by side with the artistic leanings, there dwells in her nature a strong mechanical bent—a turn for the pre-eminently practical; so that she is an example of the present idea of the balanced woman—one with athletic muscles, a trained, practical mind, and a soul keenly appreciative of the artistic."

SONGS OF COURAGE

SONG AT THE BRINK OF DEATH

Before I leap and lose myself below,
Give me one moment's look beyond the brink.
Volumes of fog, vast piles of rolling mists,
Make war upon each other like the waves.
I hear strong humming as of mighty winds,
And shock and crash, as if a myriad
Of toppling worlds were crushed and ground to
dust.

And from their dissolution, whirling, rise
Sharp fumes and strange; and all the tingling air
Seems full of unseen thorns that prick and burn.
My soul is in my hand—I shall not fear.
Now shall I test the temper of that sword
That I have spent my life to weld and whet.
Through ills I dream not of, through agony
And ruin, I shall cleave my fiery way.
The heart within me burns like glowing wine,
And as the husk of earth slips from my soul,
The thrill of dawning godhood stirs within.
I swing my sword, and with a cry I leap.

THE DRAUGHT OF LIFE

The draught of Life—ah God—how sharp it is!
How deadly bitter—and how madd'ning sweet!
Oh pang of ice and fire, how you thrill
Through all my veins, and shake my very soul!
Divine intoxication glowing red
Within your jewelled chalice, lo I set
My thirsty lips hard to your cruel brim
And drink, and drink, and wring the dregs thereof.
I am of God, and shall I fear to quaff
To the last drop, the cup here set for me?

A CHALLENGE

Unkindly Fate, and cruel Circumstance,
Why do you rage at me? For having stormed
In vain against the fortress of my soul,
Since the beginning, have you still not learned
That I am wrought of stuff unconquerable?
Though you may wound me, bruise me, and exhaust,
And though my tears and blood may freely flow,
Your savage blows shall never bow my head;
But with a steady and a level gaze
I look you in the face, and scorn your wrath.
But if perchance you stab me deep enough
It shall not be despite, but gentle grace,
That you have done me. For my spirit, freed,
Will turn home gladly, singing a blithe song.

THE GREATER DAY

Oh dear America, how bleeds my heart
When I behold the wrongs that bow thy head,
And all the shames, and hates, and plunderings,
And bitter rivalries that make thee less.
But I have seen that golden heart of thine
And know that sometime thou shalt rise in strength
And glory, and shalt clothe thyself with light,
And scatter with a sweep of thy strong arm
The things unworthy of thy name, and set
Thy house in order, and thy children call
About thy knees to help, and bless, and save.
When shall it be, dear Mother of us all?
To-day? To-morrow? Rise! and strike from off
Thy feet, those old and worn-out laws, which, like
A galling shackle, now forbid thy steps;
And be to us, and to the whole wide world,
The grateful shadow of a rock within
The desert, and a light at eventide.

Songs of Courage

A SONG OF BATTLE

Ah, Dearest One, I long to plead this prayer:—
That God will shield and cover thy dear head,
And ward thy heart from wounds of Chance and
Fate;
That thou beside still waters may be led.

(How gladly would I grasp Fate's cruel spears
Aimed at thy breast, and draw them into mine
With eager hands, and heart athrill with joy
To feel each pang thus turned away from thine.)

But though my lips are burning with these words
I still deny my passionate heart such speech,
Because I would not keep from thee that strength
Denied to those whom conflict does not reach.

Rather I pray that God will lead thee forth
And arm thy soul to meet the battle's strife,
And give thee a sure blade with which to strive—
To strive and conquer, though it cost thy life.

SONNET TO AN ANAESTHETIC

Forbidding Spirit, art thou foe or friend,
That drawest near my couch with presence chill?
Thou, Conqueror, dost subdue my sovereign will—
Forth from its house, my spirit dost thou send,
Rebelling, yet before thee it must bend.
Along the stifling tracks of sense, a thrill
Of terror creeps. Oh Spirit, cold and still,
How shall I know thee—as a foe or friend?
As friend! As friend! For lo, my tortured brain
Beating its walls in fevered throbs of pain,
Feels blissful respite; yea, as friend, for lo,
In mercy, lest my flickering spark of life
Be quenched, thou sparest me that deadliest throe,
The savage torture of the keen-edged knife.

A SONG OF LONELINESS

He in whose soul burns the divine flame shall
· know not the face of peace.

He shall be restless—restless—and his heart shall
wander as the wind wanders, knowing not
whither nor why.

He shall cry aloud with a great voice in his pain.

A force shall work upon him mightily, and shall
drive him into the high places ;

And though he shall labor and pant, yet shall he
find light upon the mountain top, and a great
silence.

His head shall move among the stars, but he shall
walk in loneliness, and days shall come upon
him when he hungereth for mankind.

Joy and grief shall be to him without measure ;

For his heart-strings are well tuned, and tightly
are they drawn.

He shall not say in his heart, “Here endeth sorrow,
and here joy beginneth” ;

For that boundary shall be dim and faint and hardly
to be found.

His spirit and flesh shall quiver with an agony of
delight.

Yea, upon the rack of joy shall he turn with torture
unspeakable.

But his spirit shall lift him up, and bear him aloft.

Songs of Courage

The planets shall be to him as a stair, and upon
the stars shall he mount upward.

He shall sing as he goeth and the world shall weep,
listening.

The heart of the deep sky shall open and receive
him.

And the doors thereof shall close behind him with
the sound of music.

REMEMBRANCE

When all the land is white with swirling snow,
And bitter winds make moan thro' naked trees,
I bend above my rose-jar to inhale
The spicy fragrance of the summer breeze.
Again the cricket chirps, and through the corn,
The bee blows music on his hunting horn.

The roses of my joys fall one by one ;
But when they fall, I gather up the sweet
And tarnished petals, storing them away
Within my memory's urn. So shall there greet
My yearning senses, in the time of stress,
The grateful fragrance of past happiness.

OVERTONES

SONNET TO A VIOLIN

Strange shape, who moulded first thy fragile shell?
Who carved these melting curves? Who first did
bring

Across thy latticed bridge the slender string?
Who formed this magic wand to weave the spell,
And lending thee his spirit, bade thee tell,
When o'er the quivering strings he drew the bow,
Life's history of happiness and woe—
A ringing pæan, or a funeral knell!
Come, oh belov'd responsive instrument!
Across thy slender throat, with gentle care
I'll stretch my heart-strings, and be quite content
To lose them, if with man I may but share
The springs of song, that in my soul are pent,
To ease his toil, and help his load to bear.

TO G. E. C.

(When I gave her my copy of Gray's Elegy.)

Go dwell among her books, my little book,
Proud to be counted one among that band
She holds most choice, and proud to touch her
hand.

Your opened leaves will see her lean and look,
The while her eyes will slip from line to line
(Dark-fringed, dear eyes,—would I those pages
were).

Then, little book, pray soothe and quiet her,
And rest her heart as you have rested mine.
Sing her a song, ye sweet and flowing words,
Carol to her like flights of passing birds,
And through the din of daily strife, and jeer
Of circumstance, oh let your chords sound clear,
And bid the wheels of thought their grinding cease
Just for a little, while you sing of peace.

A CRY FROM THE PLAINS

In that far country—that bright sunset land—
Where heaves the earth in many a wrinkled fold,
Where rushing stream, and peak, and headland
bold,

Make a wild world of beauty; where the sand
Runs golden, and the banks of pallid snow
Hide in the gorges from the sun's hot glow,
There does my spirit long to ride at ease
Upon the flowing tides of mountain breeze.
There would I be again, to watch and cheer
The valiant army of the spruces. Sheer
And riven and rock-strewn are the heights they
scale,

Flaunting their brave green banners in the gale.
The pine tree's fragrance, like an ardent song
Breathes full of passion when the sun is strong.
The wind, down-sweeping from eternal snows,
Or from some icy emerald mountain pool,
Caresses like a loving hand my brows—
Electric, magic, tender, soft and cool.
I see again the eagle wheel on high,
And downward to my ear, his lonely cry
Drops like the answer to my heart's wild call;
And I am bathed in loneliness, and all
My being drinks a draught of peace. This free
High world is mine, and it is well with me.

TO THE SEA

Oh widely-spreading, many-colored sea,
Oh tender lover of the arching sky,
How manifold thy moods and passions be.
Thou sleepest now ; but when the winds rise high,
Roaring and thundering thou dost defy
The stark deep-rooted rocks. In fear of thee
The battered, tossing, laboring vessels flee.
Of storm and dark thou art the fierce ally.
How different now thou art, oh Ocean wide !
The sunset dyes thy swiftly ebbing tide
And like a throbbing opal thou dost gleam
With emerald tint, and flash of fire, and sheen
Of milky pearl. Now dost thou drowse and dream
And murmur to the rocks a song serene.

DAWN

The star of morning, vanishing from view
Dissolves in yon far-reaching depths of blue.
Look! look! It hangs, one trembling drop of light,
Upon the fringes of the dress of night.
Nature awakes, and thrills of ecstasy
Quiver from sky to earth, from hill to sea.

DECEMBER

Where are the lilies of April
And where are the snowballs of May?
They died long ago in the early year
And their white souls drifted away—

Drifted away into cloudland
To wait till the year should die;
And now to make him a winding sheet,
They fall from the dull gray sky.

AFTER HEARING TRISTAN AND ISOLDE

The naked branches, feathering into Spring,
Are lace-wise spread athwart the sunset sky,
While underneath, the city, vast and dim,
Spreads out for miles. I hear its muffled roar,
The while my heart throbs swift and painfully,
Remembering that wild music fraught with woe.
I wait for the dear dark like him who watched
To see the quenched torch, the waving scarf—
Impatient Tristan in Isolde's garden—
The dimming sunset is my dying torch,
The crescent moon shall be my signal scarf,
And oh Isolde-Night, I wait for thee.

AUTUMN

Oh best of years—oh year of peace and joy,
Slip not so swiftly by, turn not so fast!
“Another year will come again,” you say—
But this—ah never, once 'tis dead and past.

Look where the spreading scarlet tells the tale
Of stricken Summer, wounded unto death.
The Southwest Wind is wandering, restless, sad.
“Our golden year is breathing hard,” he saith.

He chants a litany full sorrowful—
The mourning trees respond, uncomforted.
A thin blue veil of smoke obscures the land
Like incense falling, stale, when mass is said.

Far in the depths of heaven's boundless gray
Two faint black lines, converging, southward move;
The somber music of the wild duck's cry
Descends in mournful cadence from above.

Oh best of years, oh year of peace and joy,
Turn not so fast! Slip not so swiftly by!
My stricken heart calls after you with all
The yearning potency of the wild duck's cry!

TAKING WING

My heart sits crouching like a wounded bird
Who sees his singing comrades southward fly,
And flutters after them a yard or so,
And calls to them a little pleading cry.

My joys rise up and gather and take flight,
And homeward faring, leave my heavy heart
Behind—alone, defenceless, in a land
Of coming storm—with its wild bitter smart.

A LEGEND OF THE VIOLET

God wrought one day, and thought of making you.
He took two mountain pools to make your eyes,
And fringed them with the shadow-light of stars.
He took the gloss from out the chestnut burr,
Blent it with evening mist and made your hair.
Your lips He formed to match the wistful curl
Of red rose-petals, late in summer time.
He mingled fragrances and silver sounds
And many other rare and delicate
And precious things, and sent you down to earth
Made perfect with the soul's immortal fire.
And then He gathered up the fragments left
From all that made you, held them in His hand.
Pausing awhile, and said, "This is too fine
A substance to be lost or thrown away.
I will make violets from it." And He did.

THE POET'S GIFT

It fell that in that land beyond the lands,
A certain monarch sent his criers forth
To let proclaim that whosoe'er should bring
Gifts the most pleasing to his only child,
His one fair daughter, fairer than the day,
Should have her for his wife, and wed her straight.
And so from far and near the suitors came
Till all the city where the Princess dwelt
Hummed like a bee hive. On the appointed day,
With blare of trumpet, and with flash of gold,
The princes gathered to bestow their gifts,
Plighting their honors to submit forthwith
Unto the judgment. On the throne she sat,
White were her garments—beautiful she was—
Beautiful as the morning star. All hearts
Leaped and beat faster for her beauty's sake.
And one by one the princes brought their gifts—
Gold of the hills, and perfume of the vales—
Pearls of the sea, and rubies of the rock,
And dewdrop-diamonds, and amethysts,
And opals, passionate with latent fire.
And costly stuffs they gave, both furs and silks,
And velvets where the sun's rays glanced and
played,
Making a frost, like moonlight on the sea.
And some gave precious books, wrought curiously,
Filled with the ancient wisdom, sighs and tears

Overtones

And loves and hates of all the bygone days.
And one brought instruments for music—harp,
And flute, and violin. All which with grace
The Princess took and courteously gave thanks.
At last, when every one his gift had brought,
The lords drew back, waiting to hear the choice.
But one there stood among the throng—a Poet,
Who came not as a suitor, but to grace
The presence of that master whom he served;
And on his ravished sight, the Princess' beauty
Smote like a fiery sun, till all his heart
Kneeled down and worshipped her. He, standing
there,

Poured forth his soul in gazing on her face,
Nor marked how that the lords drew back a space
And left him standing, gazing, rapt and lost.
Then spoke the Princess, smiling in his eyes,
“And you, sir,—do you bring a gift for me?”
One step he took, and stood before her throne,
His flushed cheeks paling, as the rose of dawn
Fades and grows pallid when the sun draws near.
“I bring a gift, O Princess—a rare gift,
More precious than the sum of all these gifts—
Gold of the hills, or perfume of the vales,
Gems, or fine raiment, or the lore of books,
Or the sweet silver sound of music's tongue—
Something as holy as the wings of prayer,
Old as the world, and young as new-born day,

Overtones

Pure as white lily-buds, baptized with dew.
I pray you now, hold forth your hand, O Princess,
And take from me the precious gift I bring.”
The wondering Princess then held forth her hand.
He, bending, the sweet hollow of her palm
Touched with his lips, and placed a kiss therein.
Silence a moment hovered o’er their heads,
And then the Princess rose and stood before him,
Royal and tall, and laid her hands in his.

AN AUTUMN LEAF

I met a maid beside the summer sea,
And when I first beheld her gentle grace,
And caught the light that played about her face,
I murmured, "She is fair as fair can be."
And so in sport beneath the greenwood tree,
We spent the time till summer fled apace,
And rising winds led falling leaves a race,
And autumn's steps showed ruddy on the lea.
Then she departed. Not till then I knew
That round her image, close, my heart-strings grew,
And only once I pressed her finger tips—
Once stole the scarlet treasure of her lips.
I'll trust my passion to the Autumn winds—
She'll know I love her, if this leaf she finds.

AN APPRECIATION

Not an angel, not a fairy, not an elf
 (Though with an elfin's fleetness)
But just a woman, sweet with all
 A woman's sweetness—
Hair of red gold, worn crown-like; eyes
 Of the sea's changeful blue—
And mother-hands, full of kind helpfulness—
 Dear, that is you.

A FOREST LULLABY

Pools of sunlight, flooding, ebbing, cross the forest
shade.

Branches bending, swaying, sighing, sing to you my
maid.

Sleep dear, sleep dear—hear the forest croon;
Sleep dear, sleep dear—waking comes full soon.

Where the velvet mosses gather, rest your head and
sleep.

Only gentle winds shall touch you, while my watch
I keep

Sleep dear, sleep dear—hear the forest croon;
Sleep dear, sleep dear—waking comes full soon.

Let my love like floating perfume steal across your
dream;

Let the forest's drowsy murmur drift you on its
stream.

Sleep dear, sleep dear—hear the forest croon;
Sleep dear, sleep dear—waking comes full soon.

APRIL

Dear April's days are rich with sounds of song—
For all the streams are freed from icy bonds
And hurry, singing, on their way along.
When dusk is falling, by the swollen ponds,
The frogs make music in their comic way,
The Southwest wind is carolling of Spring—
The bluebird pipes his liquid roundelay
To wake the arbutus, still slumbering.
The quick staccato notes of sudden rain
Clink like a "chime-of-bells," and clink again.

And April's days are rich with sweet perfume—
The air, distilled by sun and rain, smells clean.
The scented breath of pink and snowy bloom
Drifts down the wind. The budding branches lean
Toward earth, as if they longed to catch a whiff
Of that wild, subtle odor of the ground—
The smell of sod and loam no longer stiff
With frost, but pierced by sproutlings heaven-
bound.
Oh how I love you—love you, mad Spring days,
When melody and fragrance strew your ways.

SUNSET

When the bright day is drawing to its close,
How grandly does the sun descend the West!
He gathers 'round about him rose, and gold,
And purple, as a king his royal robes.
The roaring waves cry out sonorously,
"Hail! and farewell!" and our exalted hearts,
What time we stand with arms upreaching, cry,
"Bright Lord of Life and Light, all hail! all hail!"

LOVE SONGS

Love Songs

A SONG OF THE SUMMER TWILIGHT

Dear heart, you smiled, and through the summer
twilight

A breath of fragrance drifted on the breeze.

Dear heart, you spoke, and through the summer
twilight

A flight of song-birds carolled in the trees.

Dear heart, you touched me, and the summer
twilight

With rosy radiance like the Sun-gleamed.

Dear heart, you sang to me, and all the twilight
Quivered with chords of harmony undreamed.

You kissed me, dearest, in the summer twilight—

The soft wind held its breath, and from its sphere,

The evening star bent down to hear you murmur,

“With all my heart and soul, I love you, dear.”

Love Songs

THE PURPLE PANSY

My dear, your heart is like this pansy bloom,
Royal, and large, and golden at the core,
And though I love the blossom's sweet perfume
And petals dyed and veined with matchless art,
Yet since it is the image of your heart
 I love it more.

OH WHERE ARE YOU?

Oh where are you this golden day,
My beautiful, my dear?
This wind was born to cool your brow,
This sky, so blue and clear,
Was born to bend above you—
As I was born to love you—
My beautiful, my dear.

I would I were the sod, dear heart,
My precious one, my sweet—
The happy sod that thrills to feel
The pressure of your feet.
But somehow I have missed you,
Who should have held and kissed you,
My precious one, my sweet.

NATURE METAPHORS

I

Sometimes, my dear, this little ship of mine
 Drifts, aimless, when th' inspiring breeze is
 gone;
But then thy love sits in the shoulder of my sail—
 So am I wafted on.

II

Sometimes, my dear, this little flower droops
 In thirsting after some deep-hidden spring;
But then the cooling showers thy love sends
 swiftly down,
 A sweet refreshment bring.

III

Once on a time, dear heart, the bird you love,
 Flew all alone, and sang a sad, sad song;
But then a vibrant answer came, and now the
 two
 Their blending notes prolong.

AN APRIL SONG

It was a rainy April day
 When my true love went far away.
The eddying wind's low mournful wail
 Seemed the sorrowful roundelay
To a sad and sorrowful tale.

It was a rainy April day
 The flow'rs, storm-beaten, crumpled lay—
The wooing bird-songs silent were
 That thrilled the tree-tops yesterday
 And the world was one gray blur.
But through the heart of that April day
 There came a swift wild stir;
The bird-songs rose with joyous sound
The flowers lifted from the ground,
 And see—ah see!
My love is coming back to me!

A SONNET TO PHYLLIS

I kissed you once, dear Phyllis, though you knew
It not. And thus it chanced:—the falling year
Had stripped the fields of flowers, and left them
sear,

But in my garden, late, some pansies grew,
And these I gathered for a gift to you.

I kissed each one and said, "Oh, pansies dear,
How bless'd are you to be my Phyllis near,
To gaze on her, and all her charms to view."

So saying, to you I took them. Pleased you
seemed

At flowers so late. How white your fingers gleamed
Amid the dark green leaves. You bent your head
To breathe the fragrance that the flowers shed.

Ah—then I saw one pansy's petal-tips.

Just touch you; but 'twas I that kissed your lips.

THE CALL

Dear, when the twilight shadows fall,
Then do you hear me call, and call?
My tired heart would lie at rest
Safe in the shelter of your breast.
Hear, oh my loyal love, and true,
 The cry of my heart to you.

All through the day I'll bravely bear
Sorrow and weariness and care;
Oh but I miss you—miss you, dear,
When evening comes. Will you not hear—
Will you not answer, fond and true,
 The cry of my heart to you?

IN PORT

Hush! Let the day in stormy splendor die;
Some great lost cause hurled crashing to its doom
Has bred the spirit that now haunts that sky.
Here in this far-away, secluded room
The city's roar comes faintly. Let the tide
Of daily strife go out. Here by my side
Rest quietly with me, as stranded seashells lie.

Hush! Let my glance sink deep into your eyes
Which give soft light as flowers pour out their
sweet;
And all the quiet strength that in you lies
Shall heal my storm-lashed heart and help me
meet
With head unbowed, and steady hand, the stress
Of future storm and pain and weariness.
So while I have your love, let the storm signals
rise.

WITHOUT

You are not barred from me, dear heart, dear heart,
Because I stand outside the bolted door.
My soul shall reach you where you dwell apart
And touch you evermore.

Time was I beat thereon with burning hands,
And sobbed, and cried aloud with broken cries,
And called the name I gave you—that dear name,
Wherein sweet music lies.

But now the storm is passed, and through my tears
I see a host of fragrant flowers start
Where passed your footsteps as you went your way
Across my heart.

Love Songs

SINCE I HAVE WON YOUR LOVE

Since I have won your love, and given mine,
The face of all the world has kinder grown;
Patience has poured for me her oil and wine,
And Strength has found and claimed me for his
own.

The swarming little ills of daily strife
Have ceased to fret me with their petty stings,
Because through all the changing chords of life
The melody of your devotion sings.

The days of stormy winds are past and done,
The air is softer, and the shadows make
A cooler gloom to rest in from the sun.
The sky is bluer for your dear love's sake.

YOUR VOICE

Sometimes I think, when you are singing, dear,
That my sad heart has waited for the sound
Of that dear voice for many a weary year
And sighing, rests at last, since you are found.

And now I know that I shall never bear
A strife so deadly, or a pang so strong,
Or weariness so heavy, but that you
Could re-create me with your healing song.

Wherever by the winds and tides of fate,
My little ship of life shall yet be whirled,
However tempest-bound, and desolate,
Your voice shall thrill me half across the world.

HER SHAWL

Within its warp and woof the moonlight slipped
Touching with frost-like magic every thread,
Until it softly gleamed—a web of light
Sprinkled with star dust from the evening sky.
Around the oval of her lifted face
It wound, and falling, on her shoulders lay—
A ring of diamonds round one perfect pearl—
A group of stars around the silver moon—
A wreath of lilies circling some rare vase—
The sacred samite round the Holy Grail.

STORM BOUND

Do you remember, in the days gone by,
One perfect night that fell in stormy weather?
A soft gray veil of rain shut out the sky
And shut us in together.

Do you remember how a vagrant strain
Of music through the open window drifted?
Do you remember to what dizzy heights
Our leaping hearts were lifted?

Ah Sweet! I hear again the mad, mad song
Our pulses beat the time to; and I hear
The music that your lips made with my name.
Do you remember, dear?

ROSELYN, MY ROSE

My Roselyn, because your name
Is flowing music to my ear,
Because each time it comes to me
It echoes still more dear,
I sing it in this blithe refrain
So that it rings and rings again.
Ah Roselyn, my Roselyn,
My Rose!

My Roselyn, I breathe you in
With every breath of vagrant Spring.
The violets cry, "Roselyn!"
And when the robins sing
Their song is all your name—and oh
My heart in song must overflow,
My Roselyn, my Roselyn,
My Rose!

AT PARTING

Good-bye, dear heart, God watch between us two
The while we stand not in each other's sight,
And may he guide you by his holy light,
And cherish you.

Good-night. Your couch may silver silence smooth,
May sweet refreshment kiss your closing eyes,
And may soft angel-murmured lullabies
Your senses soothe.

A DRAMATIC INTERLUDE

REASON AND THE ROSE

PERSONS.

The Old Mathematician.

The Young Poet.

PLACE

The Library-study shared by the Old Mathematician and the Young Poet.

TIME.

Early evening of a Summer's day.

A large table holds the middle of the stage. On it are books, papers, and writing materials, a set of mechanical drawing instruments arranged in a tray, and a shaded bronze lamp which is lighted. All is in good order. At the left end of the table stands a Venetian vase full of white roses. Near it sits the young poet reading a book. A large window with deep window seat is behind him, through which one sees the tops of trees. The full moon is rising and its light is just beginning to glimmer on the leaves. The door opens and the Old Mathematician comes in, a book in his hand, his finger keeping the place.

THE OLD MATHEMATICIAN.

What folly is it now? Psychology?

Rubbish! you vex your mind and heart in vain.

Do you suppose that if man had a soul,

Reason and the Rose

He would not be more certain of that fact
Than all the facts in all the world beside?
He dreams he has a soul—or hopes he may—
Reasons from slim and scanty evidence
That such a thing as immortality
Might be and ought to be, and therefore, is.
Come—leave your moonshine, and sit down with me.

(He sits at the right end of the table and opens his book
at the place where his finger kept the page.)

Here is the Differential Calculus.
And here a knotty problem worth your while.

THE YOUNG POET.

I will not cease from troubling till I know
Whether my soul shall live immortally
Or perish with this dust and be no more.
See, here—these perfect roses, in the vase—
The vase itself another perfect rose—

(He takes out one and holds it in his hand.)

How should God spend himself to make such things,
And all the beauty that is in the earth,
If he intended to stop short and leave
The smudge and stain of death on everything?
But how should you find beauty in the rose,
Seeing your heart is withered by cube-root?

THE OLD MATHEMATICIAN.

You wrong me, boy. I have two eyes and use them.
I see the myriad beauty in the world;

Reason and the Rose

But this I also see—it perishes.
Give me the rose—

(He reaches across the table and takes the rose from the poet's hand.)

for man is nothing more
Than this, save that its day is sooner fled—
See now—I crush it—so—and it is gone.
Oh think how many minds with wisdom bright
How many bodies, beautiful, has death
Smitten and left them lying like that rose—
Look, where I tossed it on the window ledge—
With all its beauty crumpled, spent and lost,
You want me to believe it lives again?
Give evidence. Show when, and where, and how!

THE YOUNG POET.

Oh I have gathered proofs you dream not of—
And now I feel to-night that I am near
The answer to my question; for a holy
Quiet fills my soul, as through the sky,
A solemn silence spreads before the dawn.
I leave you with your books and Calculus
For I am going out into the night—
The moon will help me, and the watching stars,
And cooling wind will set my spirit free
Till I have found the answer that I seek.
God and the rose forgive you, as I do.

(He goes out.)

Reason and the Rose

THE OLD MATHEMATICIAN.

The rose—the rose! and still again the rose!
What of the rose? Why, surely it is dead.
Well now, my problem.

(He straightens up again, pulls the tray of drawing instruments toward him, and selects a compass. After spreading out a sheet of blank paper, he adjusts the compass, and then pauses with it in his hand, thinking.)

What with all his talk
Of night and dawn and souls, my wits are scattered.

(He lays down the compass, and leaning his chin on his hand gazes into vacancy. A pause.)

I wonder if I do grow musty here,
Immersed in learning. Oh I must not lose
The love for beauty that was keen in me.

(He rises and going to the window, leans his elbow on the window frame and looks out.)

No, it is still the same—I have not lost it.
The sky is like a purple pansy bloom,
The moon its golden heart. The breeze is soft,
And murmurs in the treetops its old song.
The face of night is beautiful indeed.
But the moon wanes, and daylight comes again.
Oh for the power to stop the wheels of Life,
And keep the beauty of this night forever!
Well—well—I grant the boy this much at least;
It is a thousand pities that the stain
And flaw of death is found in everything—

Reason and the Rose

All that is lovely, all that we would keep
Must pass and perish—perish like the rose.

(He makes a sudden slight motion of surprise.)

What is that fragrance? How entrancingly
It falls upon my sense—how piercing sweet!
It is as if an angel bearing incense
Passed by unseen.

(He suddenly stoops and gathers something in his hand
from the window seat.)

The rose—the rose I crushed—
Pouring its sweetness out upon the air
As if that fragrance were a living soul,
Arisen from the dead immortally!

(He stands for a long time with bowed head, the rose
in his hand. Then he lifts his face and smiles.)

God and the rose forgive me! I believe!

(He gazes, absorbed, out of the window. The moon-
light floods further and further into the room. The voice
of the young Poet is heard singing without, and the old
man listens attentively.)

THE YOUNG POET.

(Without.)

I questioned the seers and sages—
I sought in the books of the wise;
But found on those lips, in those pages
The vaguest surmise.

Reason and the Rose

I questioned the trees and the river,
The flowers, the hills, and the sun;
And all through the earth passed a shiver,
But answer, gave none.

Then I reached in the depths of my being,
And loosed my soul's shackles, and straight
I passed through the Outermost Portal—
The Ultimate Gate.
And came where the High Lord of Heaven
Sat throned in his glory and grace.
His great purple wings spread before him
O'ershadowed his face.

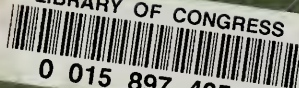
With passionate hands, and with pleading
I laid on his garment my hold,
And I cried with the whole of my being
"My question of old!"
For a moment the silence engulfed me
And then his still voice made reply,
"Go in peace. Make a new song, and sing it—
The Soul cannot die."

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